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**LENS 2**- *Stargirl* Reader-Response

Purpose: To embrace the novel in relation to my personal experiences

Audience: Children

Engagement: Defining the symbolism found in the book and relate it to my personal life, values, and experiences

Genre: Reader-Response

The novel *Stargirl* written by Jerry Spinelli poses the reader to “flash back” to another point in time; high school. Throughout, Stargirl stands out from the very beginning and in this school, that’s an issue. As the narrator states, blending in is crucial and it seems as though Stargirl is the first person to stand out in quite some time. “She wasn’t gorgeous, wasn’t ugly…Mostly, she looked like a hundred other girls in school, except for two things. She wore no makeup, and her eyes were the biggest I’ve ever seen…” (5) Immediately, there is an association to everyone else in the school which tells me that in this school the judgment classmates give to one another is key in establishing friends and relationships with others. Although unfortunate, this happens in every school across the globe; the need to associate with friends and to “blend in” to avoid negative attention. Stargirl shows great courage in pursuing her unique character and sends a message to her fellow classmates that being yourself is okay.

As students develop relationships with their peers, there is a great deal of pressure involved and I can remember my experiences in school similar to those in *Stargirl*. When I was in high school, I took a child development class where there were only two boys; myself and one other boy. Despite the lack of males in the class, I continued to take it with no thought at all that the course was for “girls only”. As the year went on, I came to find that the majority of individuals in my school thought that those types of courses were mainly for women. Feeling judged and pressured, I went to the guidance office to speak with someone who could help me understand this idea a little more. He rationally explained that although the majority of the time girls take those classes, it’s perfectly fine for boys to take it was well and just because you are the minority doesn’t make it wrong despite others’ opinions. This made complete sense to me and I embraced the fact that there were only two boys in child development. This event greatly helped me embrace my preferences in studies and other aspects of my life and has proven effective in giving myself the best possible outcomes in life. *Stargirl* reminds me of myself and I believe that by her being true to herself helps the reader come out of the shell and love themselves.

While reading in *The Pleasures of Children’s Literature*, by Perry Nodelman and Mavis Reimer, I found that they too agree with the importance of school relationships and the effects of which groups students identify with. “Belonging to some of those groups is likely to have a profound effect on how children respond to life and literature.” (90) This clearly exhibits concerns for student growth and to keep in mind that who a child feels they belong with is crucial to their continuously developing self-image and place in society. Behavior, in association with peer relationships, also has its’ own importance in the school setting. As asserted by Nodelman and Mavis, “The confusion has its dangers. Most significantly, it defines what the assumptions declare to be true as the normal state of affairs, from which any other sort of behavior is seen as divergence, an aberration, even and abnormality.” (91) This exemplifies how in some cases, an association one may have with a specific group could drastically affect his or her development of character and ability to utilize their talents. Although a fine line is present, the evidence is clear. The need for a balance is crucial; a balance between uniqueness and a sense of belonging. With these two aspects found in every school setting, it’s easy to see how adversely this affects adolescent growth.

I feel that even from the very beginning, when Stargirl sings Happy Birthday to the students, that the reader, no matter what age, could identify with a similar situation. I believe that a book’s success is based upon how many of its’ readers can connect with it. On some level, everyone can relate to a situation where an individual does something out of the ordinary and opens our eyes to something new and unexpected. Spinelli articulates this message in his novel and I urge others to take in its’ significance based upon their experiences; a unique process of self-identification. To accept one’s character for what it is, getting the most out of each and every day, and valuing relationships with others despite what obstacles or individuals get in the way.

**Works Cited:**

* Nodelman, Perry, and Mavis Reimer. *The pleasures of children's literature*. New York: Longman, 1992. Print.
* Spinelli, Jerry. *Stargirl*. New York: Knopf :, 2000. Print.